

The Art of China
Art 244 Fall 2012

Common Characteristics of Traditional Chinese Art

1. Chinese art has changed constantly through history, each era has a distinct style
2. Respect for tradition and morality, valued learned references to the past (Confucianism)
3. Yet a high regard for spontaneity and innovation, including accidents (Chan Buddhism)
4. Harmony with nature and natural processes (Daoism)
5. A long tradition of art criticism and aestheticism which has changed over time
6. A spirit of search, discovery and refinement
7. Strong influence of three religions and one philosophy
8. A long tradition of calligraphy that evolved into landscape and portrait painting
 - a. Goal – to capture not only the outer appearance of the subject, but the inner essence, its energy, life force, spirit.
 - b. Color, light and shadow are distractions
 - c. Relies on line, the indelible mark of the inked brush

The Religions and Philosophy of China

1. Ancestor worship – belief that the deceased, often family members, have a continued existence in an afterlife and possess the ability to influence the fortune of the living.
2. Daoism – animistic beliefs that stressed intuitive balance with nature. Dao is embedded in the heart of nature. To experience *Dao*, one must release one's ego and become attuned to the flow of life. *Ming* is the principle of *yin/yan*, opposite forces, male/female, sun/moon that represent the ultimate inward vision.
3. Confucianism – respect for tradition and morality codified by Confucius (551-479 BC). This includes *ren* – human heartedness and education, loyalty, justice with empathy, respect for age and authority.
4. Buddhism – Buddhism prescribes a path in life with the ultimate aim of achieving *nirvana*, release from earthly existence. Enlightenment will be reached by the middle way, rejecting both luxury and asceticism. Buddhists accept the Four Noble Truths and follow the eightfold path.

Sources: *Art Beyond The West*, By Michael O'Riley, Harry N. Abrams, Inc. 2002
Chinese Painting by Maxwell Hearn, Thematic Essay, Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History, Metropolitan Museum of Art